

VZCZCXRO4150
PP RUEHDE RUEHDIR
DE RUEHJI #0251/01 1601629
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 081629Z JUN 08
FM AMCONSUL JEDDAH
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0741
INFO RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH PRIORITY 7905

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 JEDDAH 000251

SIPDIS

RIYADH, PLEASE PASS TO DHAHRAN
DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ARP
DOL/ILAB FOR RACHEL RIGBY
DRL/ILCSR FOR MARK MITTELHAUSER
G/TIP FOR STEVE STEINER

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [ELAB](#) [EIND](#) [ETRD](#) [PHUM](#) [SOCI](#) [SA](#)
SUBJECT: SAUDI ARABIA: REPORT ON FORCED LABOR AND CHILD
LABOR IN THE PRODUCTION OF GOODS

REF: A. STATE 43120
[1](#)B. JEDDAH 00099

[1](#)1. (U) Responding on behalf of AMEMBASSY RIYADH.

[1](#)2. (U) Per request (reftel A), Post provides the following information regarding the use of forced labor and child labor in the production of goods in Saudi Arabia. Although most incidents appear to occur in service industries, there is anecdotal evidence of forced labor in the production of manufactured and agricultural goods, particularly in the forms of deceptive job substitution and salary withholding.

[1](#)3. (U) Post consulted labor consuls of primary labor-providing countries as well as professionals in the fields of manufacturing, agriculture, law enforcement, and labor law. Additional sources included local press, NGO reports, and direct interviews with laborers and members of affected expatriate communities. Requests to MoL and the SAG Human Rights Commission for meetings and data remain pending.

Special Difficulties for Migrant Workers

[1](#)4. (U) Migrant workers play a dominant role in the Kingdom's unskilled labor markets. Their legal presence and freedom of movement depend on having valid residency permits (iqamas), which are associated with a specific employer and can only be transferred to a second employer with the consent of the first. This makes migrant workers especially vulnerable to exploitation, as does the practice of employers retaining the passports of their employees. As it is often costly for employers to secure worker visas, they have a motivation to keep workers from leaving.

Manufactured Goods

[1](#)5. (U) A lawyer who accepts pro bono labor cases described the practice of deceptive job substitution at factories, wherein an immigrant worker arrives in country to find that the job available for him or her has a much lower salary than the one promised by an international recruiter before entry. The lawyer said that it is often the factories that initiate this practice without informing the recruiters. He identified cement and packaging materials as two goods where this is prevalent.

[1](#)6. (U) A credible source gave an account of six migrant workers who are currently owed five years of wages by the textile plant where they worked. With the plant now closed

and their iqamas confiscated by the government, they do not have the legal or financial means to return home.

¶17. (U) Mission's Locally Employed Staff (LES) in the Eastern Province also reported ongoing instances of job substitution in tailor shops, and noted the additional dilemma presented by job-specific iqamas, which leave the migrant worker vulnerable to deportation by MoL when performing work other than the job cited. Sometimes the terms of the contract are changed rather than the type of work. A July 2004 Human Rights Watch report mentioned the case of a seamstress whose contract was changed on arrival from two years to three, with a substantial financial penalty if she did not complete the term.

Agricultural Goods

¶18. (U) The same Human Rights Watch report mentions occurrences of deceptive job substitution in the herding of sheep, goats, and camels. In the most egregious case mentioned, a migrant worker who complained about being assigned as a shepherd rather than the gardener job he had applied for was recaptured and beaten repeatedly after his attempt at escape.

¶19. (U) Mission's Eastern Province LES reported ongoing deceptive job substitution and non-payment of wages on farms, particularly date groves. Third-country officials had few reports of agricultural exploitation of their expatriates, although these abuses may be underreported due to their

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remoteness from urban centers. Farm workers are particularly vulnerable as most are explicitly left unprotected by the Saudi Labor and Workmen Law of 1969, although the Labor Law of 2006 appears to extend protection to a greater subset of these workers.

Government Responses to Exploitative Labor

¶10. (U) The Labor Law of 2006 prohibits employment of youth under 15 and sets conditions for employing those under 18. The Kingdom is currently party to several international conventions, treaties, and agreements related to human trafficking, including 15 of the agreements of the International Labor Organization (ILO). It is also party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime, and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children. The Saudi Labor Minister has requested that the Council of Ministers issue regulations to criminalize trafficking in persons (reftel B).

¶11. (U) SAG has made efforts to provide specialized training for government officials in how to recognize, investigate, and prosecute instances of trafficking, and to spread awareness of the problem itself. In 2007, a U.S. delegation attended discussions with SAG officials, beginning a planned series of training courses to enhance SAG capacity to combat human trafficking (reftel B). Third-country labor consuls told Post that they have recently seen improved cooperation from SAG against trafficking in persons.

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